What is claimed is:

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1. A method by which a multimedia message is transcoded *en route* from a sending terminal (21) via a messaging server (22) to a receiving terminal (25) having limited multimedia capabilities, so as to be suitable for reception and presentation by the receiving terminal (25), the method characterized by:

a step (31) in which a user agent (21a) of the sending terminal (21) inserts, into the message, media characteristics of the message sufficient in detail to enable determining whether the message should be transcoded to accommodate multimedia capabilities of the receiving terminal (25); and

a step (33) in which the messaging server (22) reads the media characteristics and decides whether the message should be transcoded based only on the inserted media characteristics and on actual or assumed multimedia capabilities of the receiving terminal (25).

- 2. A method as in claim 1, further characterized in that the messaging server (22) sends the message to a transcoding server (24) if transcoding is needed, and the transcoding server (24) uses the inserted media characteristics to itself decide if transcoding is needed.
- 3. A method as in claim 1, further characterized in that the messaging server (22) sends the message to a transcoding server (24) if transcoding is needed, and the transcoding server (24) uses the inserted media characteristics to itself decide which parts of the message need transcoding.
- 4. A method as in claim 1, further characterized in that the messaging server (22) determines, from the inserted media characteristics, which parts of the message need transcoding and sends the message to a transcoding server (24) if transcoding is

needed for any message part, and includes in the message an indication of which parts of the message need transcoding.

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- 5. A method as in claim 1, further characterized in that the messaging server (22) determines, from the inserted media characteristics, which parts of the message need transcoding and sends only those message parts requiring transcoding to a transcoding server (24).
- 6. A method as in claim 1, further characterized by: a step (35) in which transcoding is performed based on the inserted media characteristics and the actual or assumed multimedia capabilities of the receiving terminal (25), without performing an analysis of the message to determine whether transcoding is needed.
- 7. A method as in claim 6, wherein in the step (35) in which transcoding is performed, the transcoding is performed without also performing even an analysis to determine which parts of the message need to be transcoded.
 - 8. A method as in claim 1, wherein the user agent (21a) inserts the media characteristics into a field in the header of the message.
 - 9. A method as in claim 1, wherein the user agent (21a) inserts the media characteristics into a header field in the body of the message.
 - 10. A method as in claim 1, wherein the media characteristics include image and video resolution, or number of frames and frame rate of visual content, or sampling rate of audio content.
 - 11. A sending terminal (21), adapted for sending a multimedia message via a messaging server (22) to a receiving terminal (25)

having limited multimedia capabilities, the sending terminal (21) characterized by: a user agent (21a) for inserting, into the message, media characteristics of the message sufficient in detail to enable the messaging terminal to determine whether the message should be transcoded based only on actual or assumed multimedia capabilities of the receiving terminal and the inserted media characteristics.

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- 12. A messaging server (22), enhanced for determining whether to transcode a multimedia message sent from a sending terminal (21) to a receiving terminal (25) having limited multimedia capabilities, the messaging server (22) characterized by: a characteristics reader and analyzer (22a), responsive to the message, for deciding whether the message should be transcoded based only on comparing media characteristics inserted into the message with actual or assumed multimedia capabilities of the receiving terminal (25).
- 13. A system, comprising a sending terminal (21) and a messaging server (22), both adapted to perform according to a method by which a multimedia message is transcoded en route from the sending terminal (21) via the messaging server (22) to a receiving terminal (25) having limited multimedia capabilities, so as to be suitable for reception or presentation by the receiving terminal (25), the system characterized in that:

the sending terminal includes a user agent (21a) for performing a step (31) of inserting, into the message, media characteristics of the message sufficient in detail to enable determining whether the message should be transcoded to accommodate multimedia capabilities of the receiving terminal (25); and

the messaging server (22) includes means (22a) for performing a step (33) of reading the media characteristics and deciding whether the message should be transcoded based

only on the media characteristics and on actual or assumed multimedia capabilities of the receiving terminal (25).

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- 14. A system as in claim 13, further characterized in that: the messaging server (22) also includes or has access to means for performing a step (35) in which transcoding is performed based on the inserted media characteristics and the actual or assumed multimedia capabilities of the receiving terminal (25), without performing an analysis of the message to determine media characteristics of the message relevant to deciding whether transcoding is needed.
- 15. A system as in claim 13, further comprising a transcoding server (24), the system further characterized in that the messaging server (22) is configured to send the message to the transcoding server (24) if transcoding is needed, and the transcoding server (24) is configured to use the inserted media characteristics to itself decide if transcoding is needed.
- 16. A system as in claim 13, further comprising a transcoding server (24), the system further characterized in that the messaging server (22) is configured to send the message to the transcoding server (24) if transcoding is needed, and the transcoding server (24) is configured to use the inserted media characteristics to itself decide which parts of the message need transcoding.
- 17. A system as in claim 13, further comprising a transcoding server (24), the system further characterized in that the messaging server (22) is configured to determine, from the inserted media characteristics, which parts of the message need transcoding and to send the message to the transcoding server (24) if transcoding is needed for any message part, and to include in the message an indication of which parts of the message need transcoding.

18. A system as in claim 13, further comprising means for transcoding (22 24) the message, and further characterized in that the means for transcoding (22 24) is performed based on the inserted media characteristics and the actual or assumed multimedia capabilities of the receiving terminal (25), without performing an analysis of the message to determine whether transcoding is needed.

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- 19. A computer program product comprising: a computer readable storage structure embodying computer program code thereon for execution by a computer processor in a sending terminal (21), said computer program code characterized in that it includes instructions for performing the steps of the method of claim 1 indicated as being performed by the sending terminal (21).
- 20. A computer program product comprising: a computer readable storage structure embodying computer program code thereon for execution by a computer processor in a messaging server (22), said computer program code characterized in that it includes instructions for performing the steps of the method of claim 1 indicated as being performed by the messaging server (22).